NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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BUI TUAN

ASEAN IMPROVES SHIPPING SERVICES

ANNCR:

THE FIVE MEMBER STATES OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) HAVE GIVEN HIGH PRIORITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR MERCHANT SHIPPING FLEETS....AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT BY VOA'S BUI TUAN.

VOICE:

THE ASEAN NATIONS -- COMPRISING THE PHILIPPINES, INDONESIA, MALAYSIA, THAILAND, AND SINGAPORE -- HAVE GONE TO SOME EFFORT TO MODERNIZE AND EXPAND THEIR MERCHANT SHIPPING FACILITIES AND TO REDUCE THE DOMINANCE OF THE FAR EASTERN FREIGHT CONFERENCE OVER ASEAN MARITIME OPERATIONS. THE CONFERENCE -- A CONSORTIUM OF LARGE SHIPPING LINES -- DETERMINES THE AMOUNT OF CARGO THAT ANY ONE LINE MAY CARRY BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE FAR EAST.

WITH ONLY NINETY-ONE MERCHANT SHIPS, THAILAND HAS FAR FEWER OCEAN-GOING VESSELS THAN THE OTHER FOUR ASEAN COUNTRIES. INDEED, THAI SHIPS HANDLED LESS THAN FIVE PERCENT OF THE CARGOES COMING OUT AND INTO THE COUNTRY LAST YEAR. BUT UNDER THAILAND'S FOURTH NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN, THE GOVERNMENT HAS PLEDGED ITS SUPPORT TO THE EXPANSION OF THAI SHIPPING COMPANIES. OBSERVERS SAY WHAT'S NEEDED MOST AT THIS TIME IS THE SCRAPPING OF OUTDATED THAI LAWS WHICH HAVE HINDERED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THAILAND'S SHIPPING INDUSTRY.

MALAYSIA, WHICH HAS A MERCHANT FLEET OF ONE HUNDRED SIXTY VESSELS, HAS UNTIL NOW PLACED EMPHASIS MORE ON EXPANDING THE HANDLING CAPACITY OF THE COUNTRY'S PORTS THAN ON EXPANDING THE

MALAYSIAN MERCHANT FLEET. PORT EXPANSION HAS BEEN RAPID, ESPECIALLY IN KELANG AND PENANG. AND A NEW PORT WAS RECENTLY OPENED AT PASIR GUDANG.

IN THE PHILIPPINES -- WHICH HAS FOUR HUNDRED FIFTY EIGHT MERCHANT SHIPS -- EXPANSION OF BOTH INTER-ISLAND AND OCEAN-GOING SHIPPING HAS BEEN SLOW. BUT PRESIDENT MARCOS HAS NOW GIVEN TOP PRIORITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY'S SHIPPING INDUSTRY.

OF ALL THE ASEAN COUNTRIES, INDONESIA -- WHICH HAS A MERCHANT FLEET NUMBERING MORE THAN SEVEN HUNDRED VESSELS -- HAS PERHAPS MADE THE GREATEST PROGRESS IN MODERNIZING ITS MERCHANT FLEET. A GOVERNMENT-OWNED COMPANY WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1975 TO ASSIST INDONESIAN SHIPPING FIRMS IN REPLACING OLD SHIPS AND EXPANDING THEIR FLEETS. HOWEVER, PROGRESS HAS BEEN SLOWED BY THE EXCESSIVE NUMBER OF COMPETING SHIPPING COMPANIES IN INDONESIA.

SINGAPORE, THE SMALLEST OF THE ASEAN COUNTRIES, HAS THE LARGEST MERCHANT FLEET, WITH MORE THAN SEVEN HUNDRED VESSELS. SHIPBUILDING AND SHIP REPAIR HAVE BECOME ONE OF THAT COUNTRY'S MAJOR INDUSTRIES. AND, IT'S EXPECTED THAT SINGAPORE WILL BECOME A MAJOR SUPPLIER OF SHIPS FOR ASEAN'S GROWING MERCHANT FLEETS.

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